
OLR Bill Analysis

SB 326

AN ACT CONCERNING MIXED MARTIAL ARTS.

SUMMARY:

This bill legalizes professional mixed martial arts (MMA), subject to regulation by the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP). It defines MMA as unarmed combat involving techniques from different martial arts disciplines, including grappling, kicking, jujitsu, and striking. The bill generally subjects professional MMA to existing laws governing boxing. Among other things, it:

1. requires MMA match promoters, referees, sponsors, and participants to be licensed by DESPP (§ 1(g), 2, & 8) and prohibits the DESPP commissioner from issuing a license to conduct MMA matches where prohibited by local ordinance (§ 15);
2. requires match participants to be at least age 18 (§ 12);
3. requires a doctor to certify that MMA participants are physically fit (§ 10);
4. prohibits betting on MMA matches (§ 13);
5. (a) requires organizations, gymnasiums, or clubs hosting matches to register with DESPP and pay a \$100 registration fee (§ 1(f)) and (b) imposes a 5% tax on gross admission receipts after federal taxes have been deducted (§ 3);
6. allows the commissioner to order the investigation of match venues for safety (§ 1(c));
7. requires referees licensed and approved by the commissioner to be present at all matches (§§ 7 & 8);

8. prohibits matches on Christmas Day, Good Friday, Memorial Day, and Veterans' Day (§ 9); and
9. requires the commissioner to adopt regulations (a) governing the safety, conduct, and supervision of MMA matches, including the licensing of match sponsors and participants, and (b) setting reasonable license fees for sponsors and participants (§ 1(g)).

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2012

§ 1 — JURISDICTION OVER MMA MATCHES

Legalization of MMA

This bill legalizes professional MMA, exempting it from the ban on prize fights, and subjects professional MMA matches to the same laws that govern professional boxing, including DESPP regulation, licensing, taxing, match rules, condition of fighters, age limits, and violations and penalties. These provisions are described below.

MMA Regulation

The bill gives the DESPP commissioner jurisdiction over professional MMA matches in Connecticut. As is currently the case for professional boxing, (1) he may appoint inspectors to represent him at MMA matches and (2) the state, at his discretion, may contract with people to serve as inspectors.

Enforcement

The bill extends to professional MMA matches the authority the commissioner or his representative has to investigate professional boxing matches. This means he can cause a full investigation of match location, paraphernalia, and equipment and other matters pertaining to MMA matches to determine if the matches will be reasonably safe for participants and attendees.

Injury Reports

The bill requires the owner of a venue where a serious physical injury or death from a match occurs to report it, within four hours after the occurrence, to the commissioner or his designee, who must

investigate the incident within four hours after the report.

Registration Requirement

The bill requires organizations, gymnasiums, or independent clubs hosting professional MMA matches to register with DESPP and pay a \$100 fee. It allows the attorney general, at the commissioner's request, to apply for a court order to restrain these entities from operating in violation of any pertinent law.

§ 2 — LICENSING

The bill allows the commissioner to grant or deny, and revoke for cause, a license to hold or conduct professional MMA matches. License applicants must file a bond, which must be conditioned for the payment of the tax on gross MMA match receipts from admissions (see §§ 3 & 4 below).

§§ 3 & 4 — TAX PAYMENTS AND REPORTS

The bill imposes a 5% tax on promoters and sponsors of professional MMA matches and penalties for violation of the tax provision. The tax, which is on the gross receipts from admissions after federal taxes have been deducted, must be paid into the State Treasury.

§ 5 — OVERSELLING TICKET VIOLATIONS

The bill makes it illegal to sell more professional MMA match tickets than there are seats at the match venue. It imposes a penalty, which under some circumstances may include license forfeiture, for a violation.

§ 6 — PUBLICIZING TICKET PRICES

The bill requires professional MMA match seat and admission prices to be published in at least three separate editions of a newspaper published and circulated in the host town, city, or borough or, if no newspaper is published in the area, in a newspaper having a substantial circulation in the area.

§§ 7, 8, & 10 — RULES GOVERNING MATCHES

Referees and Limits on Rounds

The bill (1) imposes a five-round limit on professional MMA matches and a minimum one-minute rest period between rounds and (2) requires the commissioner to approve referees who must attend and control the match (§ 7).

Referee License

The bill requires the commissioner to select and license referees for professional MMA and boxing matches in Connecticut (§ 8). Currently, he must select and license them for professional boxing “exhibitions.”

Physical Condition of Fighters

The bill requires a Connecticut-licensed doctor approved by the commissioner to (1) examine and certify that match contestants are physically fit and (2) attend the entire match for which the examination is made (§ 10).

§ 11 — FINES

The bill subjects to a \$200 fine a principal, manager, second, promoter, or matchmaker who receives or takes money or other payment from any competitor in a MMA match for any special privilege or any type of discrimination relating to a match. With regard to boxing, the bill appears to narrow the scope of the provision by limiting those subject to the fine to people who are involved in the boxing match, instead of any boxer generally.

§§ 12 & 14 — AGE LIMITS

The bill prohibits anyone under age 18 from participating in MMA matches. It prohibits anyone under age 18 from being admitted to any professional MMA or boxing match; but a person age 14 or older may be admitted if accompanied by a parent or guardian. Under current law, the prohibition applies to boxing “exhibitions.”

COMMITTEE ACTION

Public Safety and Security Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 21 Nay 2 (03/13/2012)